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CIA Got Too Big For Its Britches

The trouble with our Central Intelligence Agency has been that so many of its chiefs have not been intelligent enough.

Their task was to collect information about other nations and evaluate it — figure out if the information indicated trouble was brewing in other countries, the kind of trouble that could spill over into our own bailiwick.

Instead of sticking to the job, they had their staffs foment revolutions and coups in other countries. What's worse, they engaged in domestic spying and actually attempted to set foreign policy.

How and why they came to take on such extracurricular tasks may never be known. The efforts to unearth such intelligence about the CIA has hurt that organization greatly.

As a result, Congress and the president are now faced with the task of trying to make the agency effective again. For this to happen at all, the CIA must somehow regain public confidence.

The new charter for the CIA needs a major restructuring of priorities and a clarification of the outlines of duties. In addition — and this is going to be difficult — Congress must find some way of monitoring the agency so that it cannot again be used for political purposes.

It is essential for the United States to have accurate knowledge about other nations and their governments. The gathering and evaluating of such knowledge should be the task of the CIA. But that's as far as it should go. It should not set policy or propagandize as it did in Vietnam.

In simple layman's language, this means that the CIA should not subvert the news, plant stories or try to control the flow of information to the public.

The CIA must not function as the legislative arm of government, nor as the executive and certainly not as the judicial. If anything at all, the CIA is a creature of the three elements of our form of governance.

It can do a valuable job — but not when it gets too big for its britches.

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